

## A Different View

by Jaded

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>Author: Jaded ([opheildrowning@hotmail.com](mailto:opheildrowning@hotmail.com))<br>Rating: PG

>Category: New Republic<br>Keywords: Luke and Mara, Romance

>Summary: Luke laments lost love to a patient Mara, only to find it<br>again, staring him right before his very eyes.

>Disclaimer: These are the wonderful creations of George Lucas, and Tim<br>Zahn. Ah, and B. Hambley too since she did create that Callista chick

>and I mention her.<br>

>Author's Note: No plot. No blood (sorry kids!) but plenty o'<br>characterization if that's what floats your landspeeder.

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>He saw her coming but did not move from where he sat, perched precariously <br>close to the cliff's edge. She took her time--almost a leisurely pace. He

>sensed that she was trying to come off as indifferent, but her eyes betrayed <br>her. Her focus was trained on him, not straying from his face for one

>moment as she side-stepped rocks and shrubs to get to where he was.<br>

>Before she reached him, he turned around, swinging his legs over the cliff, <br>staring out at the wilderness. He heard her boots stop directly behind him.

><br>"You expect me to catch you if you fall?" she asked, amused.

><br>He didn't turn. "Wouldn't it be more characteristic for you to want to  
>shove me over the cliff, Mara?" he replied.<br>  
>She moved to sit besides him. He felt her thigh brush against his as she <br>sat down with him, overlooking the jungles of Yavin IV. "Only if you want  
>me to." She shrugged, staring ahead. "But don't tempt me." Out of the <br>corner of his eye, he saw the slight upward turn of her lips into a knowing  
>smile. They sat in a comfortable silence before she spoke again. "Nice <br>view," she said with a snort.  
><br>"It could be better." He turned and looked at her, the reddish-gold aura of  
>her hair reflecting the setting sunlight. Her features seemed to blur <br>before him, as if he had never before seen her truly. He shifted. "I just  
>came up here to think."<br>  
>"You've been doing that a lot more than usual," she remarked. "And not <br>doing too much to guard it. I can hear you screaming half-way across the  
>universe."<br>  
>"So that's why you're here?"<br>  
>"No," she replied sarcastically. "It's because I can't resist your charms <br>and I have to be near you whenever possible." She suddenly tensed and  
>visibly struggled to compose herself. "Of course that's what I'm here," she <br>recovered. "We are friends, aren't we?"

><br>"Definitely," he said, taking her hand. By habit, she retracted it and  
>tried as smoothly as possible to transition into a more comfortable <br>position. Leaning back on both palms, she propped herself up with her arms.  
><br>"So you okay?" she asked.  
><br>He sighed. "About as expected."  
><br>"I would say worse," Mara commented honestly. "You like tired, Luke.  
>Sick."<br>  
>"That's because I am." He picked up a small stone and hurled it into the <br>canyon below. The sound of the impact echoed around them. Gesturing, he  
>said, "That's how I feel. Little stone, big noise. It's echoing through me <br>and it won't go away. She just left me." Luke held out empty hands. He  
>couldn't bare to say her name as his whole body screamed of despair.<br>  
>"Then she's a bigger fool than I thought possible," Mara told him, a note of <br>bitterness creeping into her voice.  
><br>Luke seemed more pained by that comment than comforted by it. Mara almost  
>reached over to hold him, but restrained herself. It was not her job to act <br>as a substitute to temporarily erase the memory of the woman who had just  
>left. She would not cheapen his feelings like that. She would not cheapen <br>herself like that.  
><br>"I think Callista did what she thought was best for her, and you know Luke,  
>whether or not she meant it to be that way, I think she did what was best <br>for you, too."  
><br>"How is that?" he snapped.

><br>She pursed her lips. "She had a lot of baggage. If she stayed she would  
>never have felt right being with you, especially considering her history. <br>She was once a Jedi Knight--to be without the force, it must have been like  
>being a deaf musician. A bird without wings. No matter how much you two <br>loved each other you could never fill that void."  
><br>"We could have made it work. It didn't matter to me if she couldn't touch  
>the light side of the force."<br>  
>"Did it really, Luke?" She sighed warily, her body swaying slightly against <br>the breeze. Her head bobbed closer to his. "People don't exist to complete  
>each other," she told him, still uncharacteristically gentle. "When you <br>love someone, you don't fill up the empty spaces. You should compliment  
>them and make them better and stronger people."<br>  
>He seemed not to hear. "She said she loved me and she left me. I doubt you <br>don't know what it's like to love someone and have them--have them ignore  
>your feelings in return. To leave you in this wretched state!"<br>

>Mara looked as though he had slapped her across the face. The pained <br>expression dissipated quickly though and was replaced by a mask of pure  
>calm. She pulled herself up over the cliff's edge and moved to leave.<br>  
>"I didn't come here to have a conversation on love and despair with you, <br>Skywalker. And I didn't come here to have my confidence, or for that matter,  
>my intelligence insulted. I came here because you are my friend and I wanted <br>to be there for you if I could. Obviously, I'm not wanted here." Her eyes  
>flashed like daggers.<br>  
>A wave suddenly hit her. Blinking, she looked down. \*I'm sorry,\* was his <br>thought. She shivered at the way he was able to talk to her through the  
>force. Only the Emperor . . .<br>  
>"I know what it's like to love and not be loved back," she muttered, not <br>knowing or caring if he heard her. She slid back down next to him but her  
>head was turned away. "Don't doubt it."<br>  
>She wondered for a moment why she had let his comment slide so easily, why <br>she had accepted his apology without another word.

><br>\*You're getting soft, Jade,\* she observed, \*Or at least towards certain  
>farmboys,\* a voice in the back of her mind chided.<br>  
>"You think I'm over-reacting?" he asked.<br>  
>"Maybe a bit, but most people would find that pardonable considering the <br>circumstances."  
><br>"Most people, but not you?"  
><br>She shrugged. "Is it really my opinion that matters here?"

><br>"I've always valued your opinion and judgement, Mara. As an ally and as a  
>friend."<br>  
>"I'm touched." She smiled through a grimace, not really sure what to make <br>of the new track their conversation had taken. "Anyway . .  
>." she trailed.

>The wind blew a portion of her hair over her eyes and she let it sit there a <br>moment before she considered moving it. Lifting a hand she was suddenly  
>startled to find that it was seized by another, and awkwardly at that. <br>Looking up, she saw that Luke had been moved by the same impulse and had  
>reached over to brush away the red-gold hair that had obscured her face.<br>  
>They were frozen in that position and for some reason, Mara felt locked into <br>a strange, comfortable stillness, his hand cupped over hers. She dropped  
>her hand as though it were a hot coal and stared at Luke Skywalker. She <br>searched his eyes and expected to find embarrassment, but what she saw was  
>not that but rather a tentative fear and a white-hot flash of unmistakable <br>desire. She realized then that his hand, removed of hers had found  
>residence on her face, and the stark contrast between the well-worked <br>roughness of his skin against the smoothness of her cheek threw her  
>violently back to reality. She drew back as if burnt, fumbling away <br>abruptly and nervously, forcefully putting a space between them as she  
>inched away from him. However, there remained a cloud of tension between <br>them two-feet thick.  
><br>Mara tried to swallow but her mouth had gone dry. She didn't dare look at  
>him, so they waited in mutual silence for a little while before Luke offered <br>the next word.  
><br>He could have said something, anything else to diffuse the potentially  
>explosive situation they had gotten themselves into, but he did not veer off <br>course. Instead he said her name and in a voice so broken and full of  
>everything that had been left unspoken between them in the years they had <br>known each other, that it shattered every single wall she had built up. It  
>was a sonic boom rattling through her and it left her feeling for the first <br>time in a long time, completely vulnerable and bare to the world.  
><br>"Mara . . ." he said it again, this time with more insistence that he look  
>at him. Then he took her by surprise. A sneak attack. He opened up his <br>emotions to her and she could not resist his pull.  
><br>His hand came to touch her face again, and this time she didn't pull away.  
>They were a welcome coolness against the heated flush of her skin. He bit <br>his lip and she mirrored his nervous tic. "I . . ." he started, his face  
>hovering closer and closer to hers.<br>  
>"No," she murmured, but making no effort to support her protests. "No, <br>Luke," she repeated in barely a whisper.  
><br>"I know," he soothed, pressing his forehead against hers, "I know." Then  
>with both hands he cupped her face, checking her eyes with his and following <br>each flicker of her pupils. Without another word he kissed her gently,  
>full on her lush mouth. Then he drew back and Mara felt the briefest <br>flicker of disappointment wash over her, but then he kissed her again on one

>side of the mouth, than the other, making her forget the momentary regret.<br>  
>He stopped and searched her again, gauging her reaction. A stab of fear <br>shot through Luke as she remained blank to him. The fear that he had gone  
>too far and somehow destroyed anything they could have been to each other <br>coursed through him. It hit him now that it was the same ache he had always  
>felt around her, but had pushed into the background.<br>  
>But Mara silenced his doubts. Though she knew better, something told her <br>she had no reason not to do what she did next. She slung her arms around  
>him, and pressing his body close to hers, Mara Jade kissed Luke Skywalker <br>back with more passion than she thought she had ever been capable of.  
><br>Within seconds they were tearing at each other, lips dragging on lips,  
>bodies twisting to form to the other. Mara felt flooded with a delicious <br>heat that filled her from head to toe. She was light-headed and enjoying  
>every second of the sensation. She could not have enough of his touch, and <br>him, not enough of hers. Time had stopped for them and on the cliff Luke  
>and Mara seemed to be making up for the lost passions of their difficult <br>youths. Her hands ran up and down his back, feeling his muscled back  
>through the fabric of his Jedi robes. One of his hands curved to touch the <br>base of her neck, his fingers tangling themselves into her hair.  
><br>Finally out of breath, they reluctantly broke apart, but their faces  
>remained touching. Their lips were only centimeters away, anticipating the <br>next kiss. Then between shallow intakes of air they kissed again and again  
>and again until Mara lifted her head away and placed it against his chest. <br>It didn't take much deducing that his heart was beating as wildly as hers.  
><br>"So this is what I've been missing," Luke murmured fiercely against the  
>red-gold aura of her hair. His grip on her tightened feverishly and he <br>kissed on the forehead. Closing her eyes, Mara sighed contentedly against  
>him, allowing herself this briefest flicker of peace. Because decidedly in <br>her mind, she knew that this was merely a fantasy, and one so  
>heart-breakingly wonderful that it was inevitable that it would eventually <br>fall away into ugly reality.  
><br>Feeling her tense, Luke lifted her head to see her face. Then he noticed  
>that her eyes were moist. "Mara?" he asked, choking in sudden fear.<br>  
>Her eyes, dark and intense fluttered open and she calmly looked into his <br>inquisitive blue eyes. Without a word she kissed him again, long, slow and  
>lingering. A kiss to store up in memory in just in case this was a fleeting <br>thing. If it was the only time. She didn't need it so much as wanted it, a  
>bittersweet memory to recall in her quieter moments if this time with him <br>was just going to be a detour in the journey of life.

><br>He didn't want to stop kissing her, but he had to know if something was  
>wrong. Looking at her again, he noticed that her almost-tears had  
<br>evaporated against the heat of his skin against hers. "Mara? Have I done  
>something wrong? Have I hurt you?"<br>  
>She pushed away slightly and addressed him, letting a laugh fall off her <br>lips. "No, you haven't hurt me." Mara let him see the happy spark in her  
>eye to assure him that he had done things almost \*too\* right. "No, on the <br>contrary, but . . ." she hitched. "Luke, you were just lamenting Callista  
>not five minutes ago. And then this . . ." An involuntary red rose in her <br>cheeks and made him smile faintly. "We have to admit we are more than just  
>friends." He reached out to touch her face, but drew it back hesitatingly. <br>But she pulled his hand back and kissed him on the fingertips. "I've always  
>had this inkling of something between us, but I've been denying it, as <br>usual." Mara sighed heavily. "And as welcome as this is," she continued,  
>brushing his blond locks from his forehead, "I don't want to be some <br>consolation prize to someone you might love more." She couldn't bare to say  
>Callista's name right now. "I won't accept being second best, as much as I <br>may want this." Her voice dropped to half a whisper. "As much as I want  
>you."<br>  
>When Mara finally broke away from him, Luke's senses, which had gone <br>supernova, calmed, and his focus began to shift, narrowing to a four-by-four  
>foot square of existence that encompassed what was now most immediate and <br>most dear to him in the whole universe.

><br>Mara's feelings on the other hand, could not be called so pleasant. The  
>initial flush of excitement had given way to a thoughtful, more logical <br>somberness, but as more and more time passed and more and more silence  
>remained hanging between them, this feeling mutated into nervousness and <br>anxiety, laced with the slightest pinches of dread.

><br>Her gaze flickered questioningly to his face--one that had haunted her for  
>so many years and in such different ways. What was it now that he felt? <br>She could no read the story behind those blue eyes. Mara Jade felt her  
>heart sink suddenly to her stomach, and all the joy that had flooded her in <br>those intense kisses and those amazing touches, faded with a jagged breath.  
>Mara had the sickening sensation that she was about to regret expressing <br>those feelings that she had not fully understood herself until they had  
>manifested themselves in that unguarded moment of passion.<br>

>Angry at herself now for being so frank and vulnerable with him, she berated <br>herself for giving in so easily and taking advantage of the situation,  
>especially when she full-well knew the state of his emotions.<br>

>\*But he kissed you first\* the voice in the back of her head reminded Mara. <br>\*And when you kissed him back, he was more than willing.\*

><br>True, she thought, and composed herself a little more, erasing away the  
>self-flagellation. Straightening, she revived her old self from the ashes <br>caused by the inferno that she and Luke had created.

><br>Mara tried to sound as disdainful and collected as she always did, but she  
>had the feeling Luke could still hear her edge of fear in her voice. She <br>cleared her voice. "This isn't really the appropriate time to fall into  
>Jedi meditation." Mara looked at him, feeling her heart constrict ever-so <br>slightly as she pushed him away a little more. "So are you going to say  
>anything, Skywalker? Or should I take the cue and leave?"<br>

>Luke seemed not to hear at first, lost in his own thoughts, but when he <br>realized the implications of what she was saying, and saw her move away, he  
>jumped, almost falling off the cliff. Her arm shot and grasped his tightly. <br>They locked eyes and the pain in Mara's heart returned. "Mara!" he said,  
>his voice choked, but nothing else followed.<br>>"Hey, Luke, it's really okay," she said, but Mara wasn't sure if she really <br>meant it. She realized then that he had not let go of her hand yet, and  
>that she had not let go of his. She hadn't noticed until she had looked. A <br>perfect fit, she thought distractedly as she loosened her grip, letting it  
>slide away from hers. She didn't miss the glimmer of disappointment that <br>washed over his face. "What just happened between us--it wasn't right."  
><br>"But it wasn't wrong either," he countered in a clear voice, standing up to  
>face her.<br>>She squeezed her eyes tight. No, it most certainly wasn't wrong, she <br>thought. Quite the opposite in fact--it had felt more right than anything  
>had felt in her life since the fall of the Emperor. Maybe in her whole <br>life. A gust of wind ruffled his blond hair and he suddenly looked so young  
>and innocent to her. Was this what he looked like before the war had <br>changed him? Before it had changed them all?  
><br>A little unnerved, she spoke. "I wouldn't take that kiss--" she blushed so  
>slightly and embarrassed, forced it away, "those kisses away for the <br>universe, but it's the wrong time for this to happen. You're still on the  
>rebound, Luke, and I'm not going to take advantage of you."<br>

>"I don't mind if you do," he said with a small smile.<br>>"Be serious," she chided, but privately delighting in the compliment. "You <br>know what I mean."  
><br>"Well, it wouldn't say that it was all on your side, but I do understand  
>what you mean, Mara." His face became cloudy. "You're right. <br>Callista--that's still hanging over me like a cloud, and I have to let that

>pass before I can really move on with my life. Or at least with that part <br>of it." Nervously, Mara watched his arm move out towards her and he finally  
>rested his hand on the small of her back. In a bold gesture, she took a <br>step towards him and looked at him with full, green eyes. She heard his  
>sharp intake of breath.<br>  
>"I'm glad to hear it," she said. "First steps are always the hardest, but <br>they're also the most important." Her hand moved up to brush his cheek,  
>almost forgetting herself.<br>  
>"Mara?"<br>  
>"Yes, Luke?"<br>  
>"If now, if I can't be part of your world . . ." he hesitated, wanting to <br>word it just right, "will you at least let me be in your orbit? Will you  
>wait for me until I'm ready?"<br>  
>She kissed him on the forehead and wiped away the look of helplessness that <br>had overcome his face. Her lips twisted into a grin. "I've waited this  
>long, haven't I?" Mara made it a question so that she would not have to be <br>help accountable for an answer.  
><br>In response, he pulled her close and lost himself in her nearness. She took  
>in his familiar warmth--breathed in his familiar smell. They each told <br>themselves that this, right now, was purely platonic, so they did not have  
>to break apart. So for a minute, they did not.<br>  
>At last, Mara pulled away, afraid that if she didn't break the contact now <br>that she would have to stay forever. Reluctantly, he let her go.  
><br>She threw her hair back and appraised her once old nemesis. \*Now something  
>completely different,\* she thought to herself. He looked so thoughtful--so <br>serious. She would have to change that.

><br>"And to think I once tried to kill you," she said with a shake of her head.  
>That illicit a smile.<br>  
>"Still regretting that change of heart?" he shot back.<br>  
>"Oh no," she said, grinning, "most definitely not."<br>  
>Smiling, Luke reached out for her again as though it were the most natural <br>thing in the world. With a measure of control, Mara shot him a warning  
>glance. He frowned and seemed to admonish his hand as though it were <br>possessed of a mind of its own.  
><br>He looked at her sheepishly, blue eyes twinkling. "Can you blame me?"  
><br>"If only I could," she replied, resignation and regret streaked throughout  
>her voice. That tone soon fled and was replaced by a more playful one. <br>"Hey, just remember, rubberball, no rebound, okay?"  
><br>He sighed, his eyes not leaving her face. She felt a tingling sensation  
>shoot through her body again. "Yeah, I remember."<br>  
>"Time is the best medicine to heal your wounds, farmboy," she said <br>knowingly. Then Mara winked at him. "And getting to know your problem  
>better."<br>  
>"I think I know of a better cure than time," he murmured



mysteriously.<br>

>"Oh? What would that be, Master Skywalker?" Mara arched an eyebrow.<br>

>Luke countered with his own look, levelling her with his gaze, his whole <br>soul presented to her in that face. It was unnerving. Finally after a long

>pause, he answered. "I'm looking at it right now."<br>

>Mara felt a smile form on her face, but tried to twist it into a frown. It <br>came out as a half-grimace. Sniffing, she recovered, rolling her eyes at

>Luke, attempting to look unphased. "You know, Luke, if you keep talking <br>that way I'm going to start thinking that the real Luke was replaced by

>another evil Luuke clone. That, or Lando's somehow taken over your body. <br>Either way, I'm going to have to kill you, and this time, I really mean it."

><br>The sun, which had slowly been progressing closer and closer to the horizon,

>had kicked into high speed and was now dipping fast into the landscape. A <br>shadow crossed his face as the orb of light fled from the sky behind him.

>Mara frowned. He wasn't angry or annoyed, was he? She licked her dry lips, <br>and waited. Nothing I'm not used to, she thought dryly, but his unreadable

>face; his silence, was getting to her. Of course, it was a well-proven fact <br>that Luke Skywalker could always get under her skin, and would always get

>under her skin. And now, she had finally acknowledged to him, and to <br>herself, that he was now making a beeline straight to her heart, and she was

>prepared to let him through whenever he was prepared to take that step. But <br>not before he was truly ready.

><br>Then he laughed, and relieved, Mara let out a breath she hadn't realized she

>had been holding. Then he cleared his throat, armed with a question that <br>was dangling on the tip of his tongue.

><br>"Yes?" she drawled, a mischievous glint dancing in her eyes.

><br>"Ah. . ." And with that single syllable, Mara felt herself flood with a

>strange, tingling sensation. That was the Luke she knew, and although the <br>charming and intensely passionate Luke she had gotten to know not too long

>ago was not unwelcome, the honest, almost still-shy and naive farmboy was <br>the Luke that she really . . .

><br>". . . Lando?" He gulped.

><br>Mara blinked up. "Run that by me again?"

><br>He seemed more nervous, almost unsure about repeating the question. "So the

>rumors about you and Lando . . ." She noted that he was shifting his feet.<br>

>So he hadn't been completely oblivious to her all this time, she thought, <br>and the feeling of past bitterness filled her. But instead of feeling

>resentment she felt a last wave of regret sweep through. Maybe the last. A <br>smile touched her face, wavering but still tightly controlled.

><br>For a moment, Mara considered toying with him, but changed her mind, going

>into an entirely different direction than her character would

normally <br>dictate. \*Or the direction that everyone else in the entire, blasted galaxy  
>would expect from you,\* the voice in her head reminded wryly.<br>

>So where she would have teased, she instead was straight-forward and  
<br>serious. Where she would have stood firmly in place, she stepped towards

>him, almost close enough to touch nose to nose. Mara held Luke rapt in her <br>gaze, and she found herself unable to rip her eyes from him for even a

>second. Reaching out, not even bothering to look because she just knew that <br>her hands would automatically slide into his, Mara and Luke felt their hands

>touch and felt fingers instantly twine together. She squeezed lightly and <br>parted her lips to speak.

><br>Lifting their hands together, Mara pressed them over her heart. She looked

>at him fondly. "That's just what they were. Unfounded rumors with no  
<br>basis." She looked up towards the sky, thinking. "Now if Lando has said

>otherwise . . ." The tightness in his face eased and the small wrinkles <br>around his eyes did a disappearing act.

><br>"I wouldn't want to be Lando."

><br>"You have no idea how glad I am to hear that," she laughed.

><br>"Not as glad as I am to know that those things weren't true," he admitted,

>inclining his head in embarrassment. "I'm ashamed of it, now that I think <br>about it." The flecks of color in his eyes swam. "It wasn't any of my

>business . . ." he trailed off.<br>

>Mara touched his hands to her lips chastely, but their combined reaction <br>still caused a significant ripple in the force. "No, Luke, don't be ashamed

>of it. I'm actually . . . flattered, that I meant enough to you . .  
." She <br>pursed her lips, the words coming faltering out of her mouth. "What I mean

>is--knowing that you're still capable of feeling jealousy, it makes you that <br>much more to me. It shows that you're still human." She stroked his face

>with a hand she freed from his grasp. "A beautiful, flawed man who can <br>still change and grow. One who teaches as he learns, and learns as he

>teaches." A deeper note of tenderness crept into her voice. "Who with his <br>faults is more perfect than the most faultless of men."

><br>And ultimately, she thought to herself, the only man who could break my

>heart with one look, and the only one I would forgive for doing so.<br>

>A strange look suddenly overtook Luke's face, and his shift of emotion could <br>be felt through the force, a wave and not a ripple this time. Had he heard

>her thoughts? And had she wanted him to hear them? Perhaps she was <br>over-doing it on the grand confessions today, she mused. Hadn't this all

>started out simply as a conversation? How had it come to this?<br>

>\*It was bound to happen sometime\* the little voice said again, but this time <br>she wasn't sure if it had been her own voice, or Luke

speaking to her  
>through his thoughts.<br>  
>"I always had a strange feeling that our fate was somehow bound up together <br>in the force," he said reverently. "But I had no idea that we were somehow  
>predestined . . . "<br>  
>"To be with each other?" she finished. "It's a beautiful thought, isn't <br>it?"  
><br>"Do you believe it?" he asked. Mara saw his lips twitch slightly in  
>after-effect.<br>  
>"I do," she said thoughtfully, "I do now."<br>  
>Standing so close together, she could feel him move before he actually did. <br>He wants to kiss me again, she thought faintly as she turned her head so he  
>only could kiss her cheek. Lips touched skin and she felt him lingering <br>there; felt a breath dance across her face like the wind brushing against  
>the rock of the cliff. Flesh remained against flesh when he spoke again, <br>low and husky. She shut her eyes and let the sound envelope her.  
><br>"Oh, Mara."  
><br>She blinked, her eyelids heavy, her lashes wet. Time seemed not to have  
>passed. The sun had not yet set, but remained wavering on the edge of the <br>horizon like a hallucination. The clouds on the jungle moon of Yavin had  
>turned a silvery-gray and clung to the sky like lovers desperate to part. <br>But Mara could still see far--miles and miles beyond the treetops to  
>long-forgotten temples. It was a view that seemed to stretch towards <br>infinity. Looking out, Mara felt a cool, almost drugged sensation that made  
>her think that peace lay out there, and all she had to do was reach out.<br>  
>Luke brushed his lips against her face again and she drew in a sharp intake <br>of breath at the pleasure. Her eyes flickered to the sky again. To where  
>peace lies, she thought. Then her eyes fell on Luke, softened and then <br>opened wide and honest. And to where love lies, she smiled as she wound her  
>arms, which had curled around his neck, tighter.<br>  
>"Luke," she finally sighed. "I never want to leave this moment." She didn't <br>realize then that she had spoken this aloud.  
><br>"Then stay," he asked, his voice impassioned; heart-broken because he knew  
>her answer.<br>  
>Mara gently guided him away, her lips swollen with unused kisses. "We've <br>been over this," she attempted, humor cracking through her voice. "I can't.  
>Anyway," she grinned, "if we--if we continue on this path, you have to <br>remember, there are other force-sensitive people on this rock. I don't  
>think we could hide the disturbance."<br>  
>"Are you going to leave me?" he asked quietly, still serious.<br>  
  
>She pursed her lips and then touched index and middle finger over his heart. <br>"I've always been with you, Skywalker. When you earn my trust and gain my  
>loyalty, I'm there for the long run. So the answer is no, I'm not

going to <br>leave you. Unless you want me to."

><br>He reached out for her and this time she took his hand and held it tight.

>"Then don't ever leave me, Mara."<br>

>"I'm glad that's your answer," she said warmly. "I was hoping as much. <br>However," she said, looking at the encroaching darkness, "I'm actually going

>to have to leave you now, unless you're willing to follow me."<br>

>"To the ends of the galaxy."<br>

>"Ah, yes," she whispered almost to herself, "to the end." Then her voice <br>grew louder. "Actually, I suggest we head back to the Great Temple. As

>beautiful as the view is up here, it's getting dark and there are some <br>nasties in these jungles at night that we should avoid."

><br>She let go of his hand and ran ahead. Jogging in place, she waited for him

>to catch up. "I'll race you to back," she called playfully. He stretched a <br>little bit before he nodded back to her.

><br>Running backwards, she stumbled over a rock. She recovered with a dancer's

>grace, making it look as though she had simply been taking a bow.<br>

>"Catch you if you fall!" he yelled.<br>

>Mara paused and smiled full with her eyes. "You already have, Luke," she <br>said simply. "You already have." She turned her body, letting her eyes

>stray on him before turning her head away too. "C'mon Skywalker," she said, <br>throwing a look back, "can you take me on?" Then she shot off ahead,

>sprinting.<br>

>The day was turning to the blue of night as he took off after Mara. <br>Hurdling through brush and rock, Luke remained calm, and this allowed a

>menagerie of thoughts to trot through his mind. Mara Jade. Her name alone <br>set off fireworks inside him that he hadn't know existed, but how glad he

>was to know it now.<br>

>He thought about how he had let Callista, how he had let everything else, <br>overshadow her. But there she was still, after all these years, emerging

>out of the eclipse, a constant. And she would wait for him, he thought with <br>a happiness that was hard to hold. He would have to return the favor and

>make it a short wait.<br>

>To anyone watching, Luke and Mara would have been blurs of motion crashing <br>through green, but to each other, they had never looked clearer or more

>focused. Running side by side, they fell into harmony with their stride. <br>Mara cast a sideways glance toward Luke. For a long time she had seen him

>beyond the role of master or man, but to what, she hadn't been able to <br>pinpoint. Now she was sure, though. He was Luke, the brightest star in her

>sky, and Luke the world that she would not mind living and dying in.<br>

>It might have been a trick of the eye, the light playing off

something, but <br>as Luke returned her look he thought she looked as

though she appeared to  
>glow. There was an aura of light around Mara, and to him, she was  
bright <br>enough to obliterate the sun and dismantle the stars. He  
considered--it  
>could have been the force at work. Or maybe it was just him. Because  
<br>before his very eyes, in those minutes with Mara, he suddenly saw  
the world  
>in a different view. He now saw Mara in a different view. Both views  
more <br>beautiful than words could describe. And he did not try. He  
didn't have  
>to.<br>  
>Two figures darted through the jungles of Yavin towards the towering  
<br>Massassi temples. The students at the academy felt a stir in the  
force that  
>was more like a sound. They shook it off and continued on their way,  
but <br>not before they had been touched by this change.  
><br>But there had been a sound. Beneath the cries of the nocturnal  
birds there  
>was the sound of laughter and of joy, and it rang clear and true,  
the sound <br>of the force coming closer to balance as another piece  
of puzzle clicked  
>together. Where underneath the impartial skies, two destined to be,  
emerged <br>from their two separate paths and merged into one, and  
continued on their  
>long journey, together.<br>  
><br>  
>THE END<br>  
><br>  
><br>

End  
file.